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Revolutions, 1810-1840

Michael P. Costeloe

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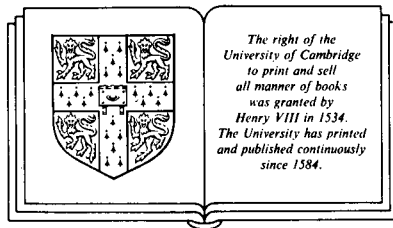
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MICHAEL P. COSTELOE

*Professor of Hispanic and Latin American Studies
University of Bristol*



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Preface

This book is about the Spanish American revolutions for independence as seen by Spaniards in Spain. It arose from a desire to know what Spaniards thought about the revolutions and how they responded to the threat and then the actual loss of their centuries-old empire in the New World. Having read many general histories and scholarly monographs on myriad aspects of the separatist movements, it was obvious that the peninsular Spanish viewpoint was not well represented in the standard bibliography. History has for the most part concentrated attention on the heroic careers of the great liberators of America and the campaigns for freedom from colonial oppression which they led, but what did Spaniards living in the metropolis think of Simón Bolívar and his fellow revolutionaries? What was the Spanish interpretation of events in America, what policies were adopted, what were the effects on Spanish trade and the merchants who conducted it, what actions did Spain take to meet American demands or to suppress them? In short, how did Spaniards respond to revolution and how in retrospect did they see the end of their nation's long role as a major imperial power?

It is with these and related questions that this study is concerned. I have chosen to adopt a topical approach mainly because the Spanish response was not determined or even significantly affected by the radical shifts of political control in the Mother Country which occurred during the reign of Ferdinand VII. Although an age of ideological ferment in Spain, liberals and conservatives, absolute monarchists and supporters of popular sovereignty, all shared a more or less common attitude towards the revolutions and even though their proposed solutions to the imperial crisis differed in detail and in emphasis, in substance their attitudes and response were the same. Their interpretation of events, the conclusions reached and the policies advocated when the first news of the revolutions arrived in

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Cádiz in the summer of 1810 remained basically unchanged some twenty years later and in some respects well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, as discussed in the introductory chapter, there was a notable consistency and continuity in the Spanish response, all the more surprising perhaps in view of the political instability at home and the fundamental changes occurring within and without the Iberian peninsula. Secondly, the dates given for the period of this study, 1810–40, are approximate only. The latter date in particular is somewhat arbitrary for I have sought to illustrate in several chapters the retrospective views of some Spaniards who looked back from the 1830s onwards at the events of their own time in what may be conveniently termed the imperial post-mortem. Again, despite the passage of time and the advantage of hindsight, few Spaniards changed their initial attitudes and these seem to have been inherited by subsequent generations of the nineteenth century. Of course, Spanish attitudes and policy were largely determined by their knowledge and understanding of what was going on in America, what had caused the revolutions and who was involved. These matters are among those examined in the first chapter and then, following a more or less chronological narrative within each section, I have divided the work into those areas of military, economic, political and diplomatic action and opinion which, taken together, are intended to illustrate the principal aspects of the Spanish response to colonial revolution. Finally, among the many dilemmas faced by Spaniards who lived through and witnessed the loss of their American empire was how to respond to the birth of the new republics in America. It was to take much of the nineteenth century for them to reconcile themselves to defeat and in the epilogue I have included some of the reasoning used by successive generations to explain their unwillingness to accept that their empire was gone forever.

Clearly, a nation's response to its imperial decline is a subject of infinite dimensions and for practical reasons as well as of historical interpretation, restrictions must be imposed. I have included nothing of what those *afrancesado* Spaniards who supported the intrusive Napoleonic régime from 1808 to 1814 felt about the situation in America, nor of those Spanish exiles, for example, Blanco White, who lived elsewhere in Europe. Similarly, I have excluded those Spaniards who remained in America throughout the years of war and, except in a few cases, have given little attention to the ideas, always treated with suspicion by Spaniards, of Americans living in the metropolis. I have

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been concerned only with those Spaniards in Spain who were directly affected by or who participated in the Spanish response. It must also be emphasized that this is in no sense a study of the movements for independence and there is little reference to the course of events in America. This is because specific incidents, for example, a major victory or defeat on the battlefields, appear to have had minimal impact on Spanish thought or action with developments across the length and breadth of the American continent proceeding almost independently of the Spanish response. This was partly because there was so much contradictory information pouring into government offices that there is a good case for arguing that Spaniards were never fully aware of what was happening or certainly never believed that they had an accurate and complete picture. Their response was more the product of an accumulation of information, opinion and their own pre-existing prejudices towards Americans. While histories of the revolutions rightly emphasize the victory of the royalist forces and the apparent restoration of Spanish dominion in most provinces by approximately 1816, it was never thought by the politicians and others in Madrid that the insurgents were defeated. They knew that the spirit of rebellion was profound and spreading and some had even concluded that the loss of the whole empire was by then inevitable.

The fluctuating scene in America was not reflected, therefore, in any substantial changes of attitude or policy in Spain. Regardless of the fortunes of their cause in the New World, Spaniards knew from 1811 onwards that their empire was under grave and constant threat of disintegration. It also appears, although to a lesser extent, that political and other developments throughout Ferdinand's long and eventful reign bore little direct relation to the Spanish response to events in America. Hence, while I have necessarily included an outline of the major political and constitutional changes in Spain, I have only infrequently referred to those activities of either the liberal régimes or those of Ferdinand which pertain almost exclusively to peninsular affairs. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that in some respects, especially economic matters, internal affairs did intrude significantly on those of the empire and there were vital political considerations affecting the domestic scene which no government could ignore when deciding its American policy; these factors have been explained and incorporated where appropriate.

A subject of infinite dimensions has, of course, for all practical purposes an infinite quantity and range of sources. Much of the

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information used has been derived from several national Spanish archives and, to obtain a limited provincial view, some local ones have also been consulted. There is in addition a mass of contemporary printed material including newspapers, memoirs and unlimited pamphlets and this has been referred to extensively. My initial impression when embarking on the research was that little had been written on the subject, but it was quickly apparent that I was mistaken. Prominent incidents, for example, the ill-fated Buenos Aires expedition of 1819, have been well investigated and Spanish policy towards some areas in America, again most notably the River Plate, has received considerable attention from, it seems, mostly Latin American historians. Also, there are a number of unpublished doctoral dissertations on one or more aspects of the subject and Spain's economic relationship with America particularly in the final decades of the *ancien régime* has in recent years attracted important scholarly attention. It is nevertheless true, however, that there are still relatively few studies restricted to the Spanish response or which offer more than a limited analysis of some of its multiple aspects. Among those which do attempt a wider view, Professor Anna's book *Spain and the loss of America* has been a useful reference for the largely political matters with which it is concerned, although I have many disagreements with his interpretation; for example, his view that 'the real failure of empire . . . and most of the real debate over American policy' took place after 1814 (p.xiv). Equally useful are the published works of Fernández Almagro, Delgado, Friede, Mariluz Urquijo and the doctoral dissertations and articles of Woodward, Rhodes and Resnick. None of these works, nor any of the other mass of secondary literature which has been consulted, has proved as helpful as the prodigiously researched book by E. A. Heredia entitled *Planes españoles para reconquistar Hispanoamérica*. For the years which he investigated, Professor Heredia located and utilized an enormous amount of manuscript material and his narrative summaries of the documents have proved invaluable for my own research.

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M.P.C.